CIENCIA FICCION

COVENTRY

UN MUNDO PARA INADAPTADOS

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“Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced on you?” The mild eyes of the Senior Judge studied the face of the accused. His question was answered by a sullen silence.

“Very well-the jury has determined that you have violated a basic custom agreed to under the Covenant, and that through this act did damage another free citizen. It is the opinion of the jury and of the court that you did so knowingly, and aware of the probability of damage to a free citizen. Therefore, you are sentenced to choose between the Two Alternatives.”

A trained observer might have detected a trace of dismay breaking through the mask of indifference with which the young man had faced his trial. Dismay was unreasonable; in view of his offence, the sentence was inevitable-but reasonable men do not receive the sentence.

After waiting a decent interval, the judge turned to the bailiff. “Take him away.”

The prisoner stood up suddenly, knocking over his chair. He glared wildly around at the company assembled and burst into speech.

“Hold on!” he yelled. “I've got something to say first!” In spite of his rough manner there was about him the noble dignity of a wild animal at bay. He stared at those around him, breathing heavily, as if they were dogs waiting to drag him down.

“Well?” he demanded, 'Well? Do I get to talk, or don't I? It 'ud be the best joke of this whole comedy, if a condemned man couldn't speak his mind at the last!”

“You may speak,” the Senior Judge told him, in the same unhurried tones with which he had pronounced sentence, 'David MacKinnon, as long as you like, and in any manner that you like. There is no limit to that freedom, even for those who have broken the Covenant. Please speak into the recorder.”

MacKinnon glanced with distaste at the microphone near his face. The knowledge that any word he spoke would be

recorded and analyzed inhibited him. “I don't ask for records,” he snapped.

“But we must have them,” the judge replied patiently, 'in order that others may determine whether, or not, we have dealt with you fairly, and according to the Covenant. Oblige us, please.”

“Oh-very well!” He ungraciously conceded the requirement and directed his voice toward the instrument. “There's no sense in me talking at all-but, just the same, I'm going to talk and you're going to listen . . . You talk about your precious "Covenant" as if it were something holy. I don't agree to it and I don't accept it. You act as if it had been sent down from Heaven in a burst of light. My grandfathers fought in the Second Revolution-but they fought to abolish superstition. . . not to let sheep-minded fools set up new ones.

“There were men in those days!” He looked contemptuously around him. “What is there left today? Cautious, compromising "safe" weaklings with water in their veins. You've planned your whole world so carefully that you've planned the fun and zest right out of it. Nobody is ever hungry, nobody ever gets hurt. Your ships can't crack up and your crops can't fail. You even have the weather tamed so it rains politely after midnight. Why wait till midnight, I don't know . . . you all go to bed at nine o'clock!

“If one of you safe little people should have an unpleasant emotion-perish the thought! -You'd trot right over to the nearest psychodynamics clinic and get your soft little minds readjusted. Thank God I never succumbed to that dope habit. I'll keep my own feelings, thanks, no matter how bad they taste.

“You won't even make love without consulting a psychotechnician-Is her mind as flat and insipid as mine? Is there any emotional instability in her family? It's enough to make a man gag. As for fighting over a woman-if any one had the guts to do that, he'd find a proctor at his elbow in two minutes, looking for the most convenient place to paralyze him, and inquiring with sickening humility, "May I do you a service, sir?"

The bailiff edged closer to MacKinnon. He turned on him. “Stand back, you. I'm not through yet.” He turned and added, 'You've told me to choose between the Two Alternatives. Well, it's no hard choice for me. Before I'd submit to treatment, before I'd enter one of your little, safe little, pleasant little reorientation homes and let my mind be pried into by a lot of soft-fingered doctors-before I did

anything like that, I'd choose a nice, clean death. Oh, no-there is just one choice for me, not two. I take the choice of going to Coventry-and glad of it, too . . . I hope I never hear of the United States again!

"But there is just one thing I want to ask you before I go-Why do you bother to live anyhow? I would think that anyone of you would welcome an end to your silly, futile lives just from sheer boredom. That's all." He turned back to the bailiff. "Come on, you."

"One moment, David MacKinnon." The Senior Judge held up a restraining hand. "We have listened to you. Although custom does not compel it, I am minded to answer some of your statements. Will you listen?"

Unwilling, but less willing to appear loutish in the face of a request so obviously reasonable, the younger man consented.

The judge commenced to speak in gentle, scholarly words appropriate to a lecture room. "David MacKinnon, you have spoken in a fashion that doubtless seems wise to you. Nevertheless, your words were wild, and spoken in haste. I am moved to correct your obvious misstatements of fact. The Covenant is not a superstition, but a simple temporal contract entered into by those same revolutionists for pragmatic reasons. They wished to insure the maximum possible liberty for every person.

"You yourself have enjoyed that liberty. No possible act, nor mode of conduct, was forbidden to you, as long as your action did not damage another. Even an act specifically prohibited by law could not be held against you, unless the state was able to prove that your particular act damaged, or caused evident danger of damage, to a particular individual.

"Even if one should willfully and knowingly damage another-as you have done-the state does not attempt to sit in moral judgment, nor to punish. We have not the wisdom to do that, and the chain of injustices that have always followed such moralistic coercion endanger the liberty of all. Instead, the convicted is given the choice of submitting to psychological readjustment to correct his tendency to wish to damage others, or of having the state withdraw itself from him-of sending him to Coventry.

"You complain that our way of living is dull and unromantic, and imply that we have deprived you of excitement to which you feel entitled. You are free to hold and express your esthetic

opinion of our way of living, but you must not expect us to live to suit your tastes. You are free to seek danger and adventure if you wish-there is danger still in experimental laboratories; there is hardship in the mountains of the Moon, and death in the jungles of Venus-but you are not free to expose us to the violence of your nature."

"Why make so much of it?" MacKinnon protested contemptuously. "You talk as if I had committed a murder-I simply punched a man in the nose for offending me outrageously!"

"I agree with your esthetic judgment of that individual," the judge continued calmly, 'and am personally rather gratified that you took a punch at him-but your psychometrical tests show that you believe yourself capable of judging morally your fellow citizens and feel justified in personally correcting and punishing their lapses. You are a dangerous individual, David MacKinnon, a danger to all of us, for we can not predict whet damage you may do next. From a social standpoint, your delusion makes you as mad as the March Hare.

"You refuse treatment-therefore we withdraw our society from you, we cast you out, we divorce you. To Coventry with you." He turned to the bailiff. "Take him away."

MacKinnon peered out of a forward port of the big transport helicopter with repressed excitement in his heart. There! That must be it-that black band in the distance. The helicopter drew closer, and he became certain that he was seeing the Barrier-the mysterious, impenetrable wall that divided the United States from the reservation known as Coventry.

His guard looked up from the magazine he was reading and followed his gaze. "Nearly there, I see," he said pleasantly. "Well, it won't be long now."

"It can't be any too soon for me!"

The guard looked at him quizzically, but with tolerance. "Pretty anxious to get on with it, eh?"

MacKinnon held his head high. "You've never brought a man to the Gateway who was more anxious to pass through!"

"Mmm-maybe. They all say that, you know. Nobody

goes through the Gate against his own will."

"I mean it!"

"They all do. Some of them come back, just the same."

"Say-maybe you can give me some dope as to conditions inside?"

"Sorry," the guard said, shaking his head, 'but that is no concern of the United States, nor of any of its employees. You'll know soon enough."

MacKinnon frowned a little. "It seems strange-I tried inquiring, but found no one who would admit that they had any notion about the inside. And yet you say that some come out. Surely some of them must talk..."

"That's simple," smiled the guard, 'part of their reorientation is a subconscious compulsion not to discuss their experiences."

"That's a pretty scabby trick. Why should the government deliberately conspire to prevent me, and the people like me, from knowing what we are going up against?"

"Listen, buddy," the guard answered, with mild exasperation, 'you've told the rest of us to go to the devil. You've told us that you could get along without us. You are being given plenty of living room in some of the best land on this continent, and you are being allowed to take with you everything that you own, or your credit could buy. What the deuce else do you expect?"

MacKinnon's face settled in obstinate lines. "What assurance have I that there will be any land left for me?"

"That's your problem. The government sees to it that there is plenty of land for the population. The divvy-up is something you rugged individualists have to settle among yourselves. You've turned down our type of social co-operation; why should you expect the safeguards of our organization?" The guard turned back to his reading and ignored him.

They landed on a small field which lay close under the blank black wall. No gate was apparent, but a guardhouse was located at the side of the field. MacKinnon was the only passenger. While his

escort went over to the guardhouse, he descended from the passenger compartment and went around to the freight hold. Two members of the crew were letting down a ramp from the cargo port. When he appeared, one of them eyed him, and said, 'O.K., there's your stuff. Help yourself."

He sized up the job, and said, 'It's quite a lot, isn't it? I'll need some help. Will you give me a hand with it?"

The crew member addressed paused to light a cigarette before replying, 'It's your stuff. If you want it, get it out. We take off in ten minutes." The two walked around him and reentered the ship.

"Why, you-" MacKinnon shut up and kept the rest of his anger to himself. The surly louts! Gone was the faintest trace of regret at leaving civilization. He'd show them! He could get along without them.

But it was twenty minutes and more before he stood beside his heaped up belongings and watched the ship rise. Fortunately the skipper had not been adamant about the time limit. He turned and commenced loading his steel tortoise. Under the romantic influence of the classic literature of a bygone day he had considered using a string of burros, but had been unable to find a zoo that would sell them to him. It was just as well-he was completely ignorant of the limits, foibles, habits, vices, illnesses, and care of those useful little beasts, and unaware of his own ignorance. Master and servant would have vied in making each other unhappy.

The vehicle he had chosen was not an unreasonable substitute for burros. It was extremely rugged, easy to operate, and almost foolproof. It drew its power from six square yards of sunpower screens on its low curved roof. These drove a constant-load motor, or, when halted, replenished the storage battery against cloudy weather, or night travel. The bearings were 'everlasting', and every moving part, other than the caterpillar treads and the controls, were sealed up, secure from inexpert tinkering.

It could maintain a steady six miles per hour on smooth, level pavement. When confronted by hills, or rough terrain, it did not stop, but simply slowed until the task demanded equaled its steady power output.

The steel tortoise gave MacKinnon a feeling of Crusoe-like independence. It did not occur to him his chattel was the end

product of the cumulative effort and intelligent co-operation of hundreds of thousands of men, living and dead. He had been used all his life to the unfailing service of much more intricate machinery, and honestly regarded the tortoise as a piece of equipment of the same primitive level as a wood-man's axe, or a hunting knife. His talents had been devoted in the past to literary criticism rather than engineering, but that did not prevent him from believing that his native intelligence and the aid of a few reference books would be all that he would really need to duplicate the tortoise, if necessary.

Metal ores were necessary, he knew, but saw no obstacle in that, his knowledge of the difficulties of prospecting, mining, and metallurgy being as sketchy as his knowledge of burros.

His goods filled every compartment of the compact little freighter. He checked the last item from his inventory and ran a satisfied eye down the list. Any explorer or adventurer of the past might well be pleased with such equipment, he thought. He could imagine showing Jack London his knockdown cabin. See, Jack, he would say, it's proof against any kind of weather-perfectly insulated walls and floor-and can't rust. It's so light that you can set it up in five minutes by yourself, yet it's so strong that you can sleep sound with the biggest grizzly in the world snuffling right outside your door.

And London would scratch his head, and say, Dave, you're a wonder. If I'd had that in the Yukon, it would have been a cinch!

He checked over the list again. Enough concentrated and desiccated food and vitamin concentrate to last six months. That would give him time enough to build hothouses for hydroponics, and get his seeds started. Medical supplies-he did not expect to need those, but foresight was always best. Reference books of all sorts. A light sporting rifle-vintage: last century. His face clouded a little at this. The War Department had positively refused to sell him a portable blaster. When he had claimed the right of common social heritage, they had grudgingly provided him with the plans and specifications, and told him to build his own. Well, he would, the first spare time he got.

Everything else was in order. MacKinnon climbed into the cockpit, grasped the two hand controls, and swung the nose of the tortoise toward the guardhouse. He had been ignored since the ship had landed; he wanted to have the gate opened and to leave.

Several soldiers were gathered around the guardhouse.

He picked out a legate by the silver stripe down the side of his kilt and spoke to him. “I'm ready to leave. Will you kindly open the Gate?”

“O.K.,” the officer answered him, and turned to a soldier who wore the plain gray kilt of a private's field uniform. “Jenkins, tell the power house to dilate-about a number three opening, tell them,” he added, sizing up the dimensions of the tortoise.

He turned to MacKinnon. “It is my duty to tell you that you may return to civilization, even now, by agreeing to be hospitalized for your neurosis.”

“I have no neurosis!”

“Very well. If you change your mind at any future time, return to the place where you entered. There is an alarm there with which you may signal to the guard that you wish the gate opened.”

“I can't imagine needing to know that.”

The legate shrugged. “Perhaps not-but we send refugees to quarantine all the time. If I were making the rules, it might be harder to get out again.” He was cut off by the ringing of an alarm. The soldiers near them moved smartly away, drawing their blasters from their belts as they ran. The ugly snout of a fixed blaster poked out over the top of the guardhouse and pointed toward the Barrier.

The legate answered the question on MacKinnon's face. “The power house is ready to open up.” He waved smartly toward that building, then turned back. “Drive straight through the center of the opening. It takes a lot of power to suspend the stasis; if you touch the edge, we'll have to pick up the pieces.”

A tiny, bright dot appeared in the foot of the barrier opposite where they waited. It spread into a half circle across the lampblack nothingness. Now it was large enough for MacKinnon to see the countryside beyond through the arch it had formed. He peered eagerly.

The opening grew until it was twenty feet wide, then stopped. It framed a scene of rugged, barren hills. He took this in, and turned angrily on the legate. “I've been tricked!” he exclaimed. “That's not fit land to support a man.”

“Don't be hasty,” he told MacKinnon. “There's good land beyond. Besides-you don't have to enter. But if you are going,

go!”

MacKinnon flushed, and pulled back on both hand controls. The treads bit in and the tortoise lumbered away, straight for the Gateway to Coventry.

When he was several yards beyond the Gate, he glanced back. The Barrier loomed behind him, with nothing to show where the opening had been. There was a little sheet metal shed adjacent to the point where he had passed through. He supposed that it contained the alarm the legate had mentioned, but he was not interested and turned his eyes back to his driving.

Stretching before him, twisting between rocky hills, was a road of sorts. It was not paved and the surface had not been repaired recently, but the grade averaged downhill and the tortoise was able to maintain a respectable speed. He continued down it, not because he fancied it, but because it was the only road which led out of surroundings obviously unsuited to his needs.

The road was untraveled. This suited him; he had no wish to encounter other human beings until he had located desirable land to settle on, and had staked out his claim. But the hills were not devoid of life; several times he caught glimpses of little dark shapes scurrying among the rocks, and occasionally bright, beady eyes stared back into his.

It did not occur to him at first that these timid little animals, streaking for cover at his coming, could replenish his larder-he was simply amused and warmed by their presence. When he did happen to consider that they might be used as food, the thought was at first repugnant to him-the custom of killing for 'sport” had ceased to be customary long before his time; and inasmuch as the development of cheap synthetic proteins in the latter half of the preceding century had spelled the economic ruin of the business of breeding animals for slaughter, it is doubtful if he had ever tasted animal tissue in his life.

But once considered, it was logical to act. He expected to live off the country; although he had plenty of food on hand for the immediate future, it would be wise to conserve it by using what the country offered. He suppressed his esthetic distaste and ethical misgivings, and determined to shoot one of the little animals at the first opportunity.

Accordingly, he dug out the rifle, loaded it, and placed

it handy. With the usual perversity of the world-as-it-is, no game was evident for the next half hour. He was passing a little shoulder of rocky outcropping when he saw his prey. It peeked at him from behind a small boulder, its sober eyes wary but unperturbed. He stopped the tortoise and took careful aim, resting and steadying the rifle on the side of the cockpit. His quarry accommodated him by hopping out into full view.

He pulled the trigger, involuntarily tensing his muscles and squinting his eyes as he did so. Naturally, the shot went high and to the right.

But he was much too busy just then to be aware of it. It seemed that the whole world had exploded. His right shoulder was numb, his mouth stung as if he had been kicked there, and his ears rang in a strange and unpleasant fashion. He was surprised to find the gun still intact in his hands and apparently none the worse for the incident.

He put it down, clambered out of the car, and rushed up to where the small creature had been. There was no sign of it anywhere. He searched the immediate neighborhood, but did not find it. Mystified, he returned to his conveyance, having decided that the rifle was in some way defective, and that he should inspect it carefully before attempting to fire it again.

His recent target watched his actions cautiously from a vantage point yards away, to which it had stampeded at the sound of the shot. It was equally mystified by the startling events, being no more used to firearms than was MacKinnon.

Before he started the tortoise again, MacKinnon had to see to his upper lip, which was swollen and tender and bleeding from a deep scratch. This increased his conviction that the gun was defective. Nowhere in the romantic literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to which he was addicted, had there been a warning that, when firing a gun heavy enough to drop a man in his tracks, it is well not to hold the right hand in such ~ manner that the recoil will cause the right thumb and thumb nail to strike the mouth.

He applied an antiseptic and a dressing of sorts, and went on his way, somewhat subdued. The arroyo by which he had entered the hills had widened out, and the hills were greener. He passed around one sharp turn in the road, and found a broad fertile valley spread out before him. It stretched away until it was lost in the

warm day's haze.

Much of the valley was cultivated, and he could make out human habitations. He continued toward it with mixed feelings. People meant fewer hardships, but it did not look as if staking out a claim would be as simple as he had hoped. However-Coventry was a big place.

He had reached the point where the road gave onto the floor of the valley, when two men stepped out into his path. They were carrying weapons of some sort at the ready. One of them called out to him:

“Halt!”

MacKinnon did so, and answered him as they came abreast. “What do you want?”

“Customs inspection. Pull over there by the office.” He indicated a small building set back a few feet from the road, which MacKinnon had not previously noticed. He looked from it back to the spokesman, and felt a slow, unreasoning heat spread up from his viscera. It rendered his none too stable judgment still more unsound.

“What the deuce are you talking about?” he snapped. “Stand aside and let me pass.”

The one who had remained silent raised his weapon and aimed it at MacKinnon's chest. The other grabbed his arm and pulled the weapon out of line. “Don't shoot the dumb fool, Joe,” he said testily. “You're always too anxious.” Then to MacKinnon, 'You're resisting the law. Come on-be quick about it!”

“The law?” MacKinnon gave a bitter laugh and snatched his rifle from the seat. It never reached his shoulder-the man who had done all the talking fired casually, without apparently taking time to aim. MacKinnon's rifle was smacked from his grasp and flew into the air, landing in the roadside ditch behind the tortoise.

The man who had remained silent followed the flight of the gun with detached interest, and remarked, 'Nice shot, Blackie. Never touched him.”

“Oh, just luck,” the other demurred, but grinned his pleasure at the compliment. “Glad I didn't nick him, though-saves writing out a report.” He reassumed an official manner, spoke again to

MacKinnon, who had been sitting dumbfounded, rubbing his smarting hands. “Well, tough guy? Do you behave, or do we come up there and get you?”

MacKinnon gave in. He drove the tortoise to the designated spot, and waited sullenly for orders. “Get out and start unloading,” he was told. He obeyed, under compulsion. As he piled his precious possessions on the ground, the one addressed as Blackie separated the things into two piles, while Joe listed them on a printed form. He noticed presently that Joe listed only the items that went into the first pile. He understood this when Blackie told him to reload the tortoise with the items from that pile, and commenced himself to carry goods from the other pile into the building. He started to protest-Joe punched him in the mouth, coolly and without rancor. MacKinnon went down, but got up again, fighting. He was in such a blind rage that he would have tackled a charging rhino. Joe timed his rush, and clipped him again. This time he could not get up at once.

Blackie stepped over to a washstand in one corner of the office. He came back with a wet towel and chucked it at MacKinnon. “Wipe your face on that, bud, and get back in the buggy. We got to get going.”

MacKinnon had time to do a lot of serious thinking as he drove Blackie into town. Beyond a terse answer of 'Prize court” to MacKinnon's inquiry as to their destination, Blackie did not converse, nor did MacKinnon press him, anxious as he was to have information. His mouth pained him from repeated punishment, his head ached, and he was no longer tempted to precipitate action by hasty speech.

Evidently Coventry was not quite the frontier anarchy he had expected it to be. There was a government of sorts, apparently, but it resembled nothing that he had ever been used to. He had visualized a land of noble, independent spirits who gave each other wide berth and practiced mutual respect. There would be villains, of course, but they would be treated to summary, and probably lethal, justice as quickly as they demonstrated their ugly natures. He had a strong, though subconscious, assumption that virtue is necessarily triumphant.

But having found government, he expected it to follow the general pattern that he had been used to all his life-honest, conscientious, reasonably efficient, and invariably careful of a citizen's rights and liberties. He was aware that government had not always been like that, but he had never experienced it-the idea was as remote

and implausible as cannibalism, or chattel slavery.

Had he stopped to think about it, he might have realized that public servants in Coventry would never have been examined psychologically to determine their temperamental fitness for their duties, and, since every inhabitant of Coventry was there-as he was-for violating a basic custom and ref using treatment thereafter, it was a foregone conclusion that most of them would be erratic and arbitrary.

He pinned his hope on the knowledge that they were going to court. All he asked was a chance to tell his story to the judge.

His dependence on judicial procedure may appear inconsistent in view of how recently he had renounced all reliance on organized government, but while he could renounce government verbally, but he could not do away with a lifetime of environmental conditioning. He could curse the court that had humiliated him by condemning him to the Two Alternatives, but he expected courts to dispense justice. He could assert his own rugged independence, but he expected persons he encountered to behave as if they were bound by the Covenant-he had met no other sort. He was no more able to discard his past history than he would have been to discard his accustomed body.

But he did not know it yet.

MacKinnon failed to stand up when the judge entered the court room. Court attendants quickly set him right, but not before he had provoked a glare from the bench. The judge's appearance and manner were not reassuring. He was a well-fed man, of ruddy complexion, whose sadistic temper was evident in face and mien. They waited while he dealt drastically with several petty offenders. It seemed to MacKinnon, as he listened, that almost everything was against the law.

Nevertheless, he was relieved when his name was called. He stepped up and undertook at once to tell his story. The judge's gavel cut him short.

“What is this case?” the judge demanded, his face set in grim lines. “Drunk and disorderly, apparently. I shall put a stop to this slackness among the young if it takes the last ounce of strength in my body!” He turned to the clerk. “Any previous offences?”

The clerk whispered in his ear. The judge threw

MacKinnon a look of mixed annoyance and suspicion, then told the customs" guard to come forward. Blackie told a clear, straightforward tale with the ease of a man used to giving testimony. MacKinnon's condition was attributed to resisting an officer in the execution of his duty. He submitted the inventory his colleague had prepared, but failed to mention the large quantity of goods which had been abstracted before the inventory was made.

The judge turned to MacKinnon. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"I certainly have, Doctor," he began eagerly. "There isn't a word of -,

Bang! The gavel cut him short. A court attendant hurried to MacKinnon's side and attempted to explain to him the proper form to use in addressing the court. The explanation confused him. In his experience, 'judge" naturally implied a medical man-a psychiatrist skilled in social problems. Nor had he heard of any special speech forms appropriate to a courtroom. But he amended his language as instructed.

"May it please the Honorable Court, this man is lying. He and his companion assaulted and robbed me. I was simply-'Smugglers generally think they are being robbed when customs officials catch them," the judge sneered. "Do you deny that you attempted to resist inspection?"

"No, Your Honor, but -"

"That will do. Penalty of fifty percent is added to the established scale of duty. Pay the clerk."

"But, Your Honor, I can't -"

"Can't you pay it?"

"I haven't any money. I have only my possessions."

"So?" He turned to the clerk. "Condemnation proceedings. Impound his goods. Ten days for vagrancy. The community can't have these immigrant paupers roaming at large, and preying on law-abiding citizens. Next case!"

They hustled him away. It took the sound of a key grating in a barred door behind him to make him realize his

predicament.

“Hi, pal, how's the weather outside?” The detention cell had a prior inmate, a small, well-knit man who looked up from a game of solitaire to address MacKinnon. He sat astraddle a bench on which he had spread his cards, and studied the newcomer with unworried, bright, beady eyes.

“Clear enough outside-but stormy in the courtroom,” MacKinnon answered, trying to adopt the same bantering tone and not succeeding very well. His mouth hurt him and spoiled his grin.

The other swung a leg over the bench and approached him with a light, silent step. “Say, pal, you must 'a” caught that in a gear box,” he commented, inspecting MacKinnon's mouth. “Does it hurt?”

“Like the devil,” MacKinnon admitted.

“We'll have to do something about that.” He went to the cell door and rattled it. “Hey! Lefty! The house is on fire! Come arunnin'!”

The guard sauntered down and stood opposite their cell door. “Wha” d'yuh want, Fader?” he said noncommittally.

“My old school chum has been slapped in the face with a wrench, and the pain is inordinate. Here's a chance for you to get right with Heaven by oozing down to the dispensary, snagging a dressing and about five grains of neoanodyne.”

The guard's expression was not encouraging. The prisoner looked grieved. “Why, Lefty,” he said, 'I thought you would jump at a chance to do a little pure charity like that.” He waited for a moment, then added, 'Tell you what-you do it, and I'll show you how to work that puzzle about "How old is Ann?" Is it a go?”

“Show me first.”

“It would take too long. I'll write it out and give it to you.”

When the guard returned, MacKinnon's cellmate dressed his wounds with gentle deftness, talking the while. “They call me Fader Magee. What's your name, pal?”

“David MacKinnon. I'm sorry, but I didn't quite catch your first name.”

“Fader. It isn't,” he explained with a grin, 'the name my mother gave me. It's more a professional tribute to my shy and unobtrusive nature.”

MacKinnon looked puzzled. “Professional tribute? What is your profession?”

Magee looked pained. “Why, Dave,” he said, 'I didn't ask you that. However,” he went on, 'it's probably the same as yours-self-preservation.”

Magee was a sympathetic listener, and MacKinnon welcomed the chance to tell someone about his troubles. He related the story of how he had decided to enter Coventry rather than submit to the sentence of the court, and how he had hardly arrived when he was hijacked and hauled into court. Magee nodded. “I'm not surprised,” he observed. “A man has to have larceny in his heart, or he wouldn't be a customs guard.”

“But what happens to my belongings?”

“They auction them off to pay the duty.”

“I wonder how much there will be left for me?”

Magee stared at him. “Left over? There won't be anything left over. You'll probably have to pay a deficiency judgment.”

“Huh? What's that?”

“It's a device whereby the condemned pays for the execution,” Magee explained succinctly, if somewhat obscurely. “What it means to you is that when your ten days is up, you'll still be in debt to the court. Then it's the chain gang for you, my lad-you'll work it off at a dollar a day.”

“Fader-you're kidding me.”

“Wait and see. You've got a lot to learn, Dave.”

Coventry was an even more complex place than MacKinnon had gathered up to this time. Magee explained to him that

there were actually three sovereign, independent jurisdictions. The jail where they were prisoners lay in the so-called New America. It had the forms of democratic government, but the treatment he had already received was a fair sample of the fashion in which it was administered.

"This place is heaven itself compared with the Free State," Magee maintained. "I've been there-" The Free State was an absolute dictatorship; the head man of the ruling clique was designated the 'Liberator'. Their watchwords were Duty and Obedience; an arbitrary discipline was enforced with a severity that left no room for any freedom of opinion. Governmental theory was vaguely derived from the old functionalist doctrines. The state was thought of as a single organism with a single head, a single brain, and a single purpose. Anything not compulsory was forbidden. "Honest so help me," claimed Magee, 'you can't go to bed in that place without finding one of their damned secret police between the sheets."

"But at that," he continued, 'it's an easier place to live than with the Angels."

"The Angels?"

"Sure. We still got 'em. Must have been two or three thousand die-hards that chose to go to Coventry after the Revolution-you know that. There's still a colony up in the hills to the north, complete with Prophet Incarnate and the works. They aren't bad hombres, but they'll pray you into heaven even if it kills you."

All three states had one curious characteristic in common-each one claimed to be the only legal government of the entire United States, and each looked forward to some future day when they would reclaim the 'unredeemed" portion; i.e., outside Coventry. To the Angels, this was an event which would occur when the First Prophet returned to earth to lead them again. In New America it was hardly more than a convenient campaign plank, to be forgotten after each election. But in the Free State it was a fixed policy.

Pursuant to this purpose there had been a whole series of wars between the Free State and New America. The Liberator held, quite logically, that New America was an unredeemed section, and that is was necessary to bring it under the rule of the Free State before the advantages of their culture could be extended to the outside.

Magee's words demolished MacKinnon's dream of finding an anarchistic utopia within the barrier, but he could not let his fond illusion die without a protest. “But see here, Fader,” he persisted, 'isn't there some place where a man can live quietly by himself without all this insufferable interference?”

“No-'considered Fader, 'no . . . not unless you took to the hills and hid. Then you 'ud be all right, as long as you steered clear of the Angels. But it would be pretty slim pickin's, living off the country. Ever tried it?”

“No . . . not exactly-but I've read all the classics: Zane Grey, and Emerson Hough, and so forth.”

“Well . . . maybe you could do it. But if you really want to go off and be a hermit, you 'ud do better to try it on the Outside, where there aren't so many objections to it.”

“No'-MacKinnon's backbone stiffened at once-'no, I'll never do that. I'll never submit to psychological reorientation just to have a chance to be let alone. If I could go back to where I was before a couple of months ago, before I was arrested, it might be all right to go off to the Rockies, or look up an abandoned farm somewhere. . . But with that diagnosis staring me in the face . . . after being told I wasn't fit for human society until I had had my emotions re-tailored to fit a cautious little pattern, I couldn't face it. Not if it meant going to a sanitarium”

“I see,” agreed Fader, nodding, 'you want to go to Coventry, but you don't want the Barrier to shut you off from the rest of the world.”

“No, that's not quite fair . . . Well, maybe, in a way. Say, you don't think I'm not fit to associate with, do you?”

“You look all right to me,” Magee reassured him, with a grin, 'but I'm in Coventry too, remember. Maybe I'm no judge.”

“You don't talk as if you liked it much. Why are you here?”

Magee held up a gently admonishing finger. “Tut! Tut! That is the one question you must never ask a man here. You must assume that he came here because he knew how swell everything is here.”

“Still . . . you don't seem to like it.”

“I didn't say I didn't like it. I do like it; it has flavor. Its little incongruities are a source of innocent merriment. And anytime they turn on the heat I can always go back through the Gate and rest up for a while in a nice quiet hospital, until things quiet down.”

MacKinnon was puzzled again. “Turn on the heat? Do they supply too hot weather here?”

“Huh? Oh. I didn't mean weather control-there isn't any of that here, except what leaks over from outside. I was just using an old figure of speech.”

“What does it mean?”

Magee smiled to himself. “You'll find out.”

After supper-bread, stew in a metal dish, a small apple-Magee introduced MacKinnon to the mysteries of cribbage. Fortunately, MacKinnon had no cash to lose. Presently Magee put the cards down without shuffling them. “Dave,” he said, 'are you enjoying the hospitality offered by this institution?”

“Hardly-Why?”

“I suggest that we check out.”

“A good idea, but how?”

“That's what I've been thinking about. Do you suppose you could take another poke on that battered phiz of yours, in a good cause?”

MacKinnon cautiously fingered his face. “I suppose so-if necessary. It can't do me much more harm, anyhow.”

“That's mother's little man! Now listen-this guard, Lefty, in addition to being kind o” unbright, is sensitive about his appearance. When they turn out the lights, you -”

“Let me out of here! Let me out of here!” MacKinnon beat on the bars and screamed. No answer came. He renewed the racket, his voice an hysterical falsetto. Lefty arrived to investigate, grumbling.

“What the hell's eating on you?” he demanded, peering

through the bars.

MacKinnon changed to tearful petition. “Oh, Lefty, please let me out of here. Please! I can't stand the dark. It's dark in here-please don't leave me alone.” He flung himself, sobbing, on the bars.

The guard cursed to himself. “Another slugnutty. Listen, you-shut up, and go to sleep, or I'll come in there, and give you something to yelp for!” He started to leave.

MacKinnon changed instantly to the vindictive, unpredictable anger of the irresponsible. “You big ugly baboon! You rat-faced idiot! Where'd you get that nose?”

Lefty turned back, fury in his face. He started to speak. MacKinnon cut him short. “Yah! Yah! Yah!” he gloated, like a nasty little boy, 'Lefty's mother was scared by a warthog-The guard swung at the spot where MacKinnon's face was pressed between the bars of the door. MacKinnon ducked and grabbed simultaneously. Off balance at meeting no resistance, the guard rocked forward, thrusting his forearm between the bars. MacKinnon's fingers slid along his arm, and got a firm purchase on Lefty's wrist.

He threw himself backwards, dragging the guard with him, until Lefty was jammed up against the outside of the barred door, with one arm inside, to the wrist of which MacKinnon clung as if welded.

The yell which formed in Lefty's throat miscarried; Magee had already acted. Out of the darkness, silent as death, his slim hands had snaked between the bars and imbedded themselves in the guard's fleshy neck. Lefty heaved, and almost broke free, but MacKinnon threw his weight to the right and twisted the arm he gripped in an agonizing, bone-breaking leverage.

It seemed to MacKinnon that they remained thus, like some grotesque game of statues, for an endless period. His pulse pounded in his ears until he feared that it must be heard by others, and bring rescue to Lefty. Magee spoke at last:

“That's enough,” he whispered. “Go through his pockets.”

He made an awkward job if it, for his hands were numb and trembling from the strain, and it was anything but convenient to

work between the bars. But the keys were there, in the last pocket he tried. He passed them to Magee, who let the guard slip to the floor, and accepted them.

Magee made a quick job of it. The door swung open with a distressing creak. Dave stepped over Lefty's body, but Magee kneeled down, unhooked a truncheon from the guard's belt, and cracked him behind the ear with it. MacKinnon paused.

“Did you kill him?” he asked.

“Cripes, no,” Magee answered softly, 'Lefty is a friend of mine. Let's go.”

They hurried down the dimly lighted passageway between cells toward the door leading to the administrative offices-their only outlet. Lefty had carelessly left it ajar, and light shone through the crack, but as they silently approached it, they heard ponderous footsteps from the far side. Dave looked hurriedly for cover, but the best he could manage was to slink back into the corner formed by the cell block and the wall. He glanced around for Magee, but he had disappeared.

The door swung open; a man stepped through, paused, and looked around. MacKinnon saw that he was carrying a blacklight, and wearing its complement-rectifying spectacles. He realized then that the darkness gave him no cover. The blacklight swung his way; he tensed to spring-He heard a dull 'clunk!” The guard sighed, swayed gently, then collapsed into a loose pile. Magee stood over him, poised on the balls of his feet, and surveyed his work, while caressing the business end of the truncheon with the cupped fingers of his left hand.

“That will do,” he decided. “Shall we go, Dave?”

He eased through the door without waiting for an answer; MacKinnon was close behind him. The lighted corridor led away to the right and ended in a large double door to the street. On the left wall, near the street door, a smaller office door stood open.

Magee drew MacKinnon to him. “It's a cinch,” he whispered. “There'll be nobody in there now but the desk sergeant. We get past him, then out that door, and into the ozone-” He motioned Dave to keep behind him, and crept silently up to the office door. After drawing a small mirror from a pocket in his belt, he lay down on the floor, placed his head near the doorframe, and cautiously extended the tiny mirror an inch or two past the edge.

Apparently he was satisfied with the reconnaissance the improvised periscope afforded, for he drew himself back onto his knees and turned his head so that MacKinnon could see the words shaped by his silent lips. “It's all right,” he breathed, 'there is only- Two hundred pounds of uniformed nemesis landed on his shoulders. A clanging alarm sounded through the corridor. Magee went down fighting, but he was outclassed and caught off guard. He jerked his head free and shouted, 'Run for it, kid!”

MacKinnon could hear running feet somewhere, but could see nothing but the struggling figures before him. He shook his head and shoulders like a dazed animal, then kicked the larger of the two contestants in the face. The man screamed and let go his hold. MacKinnon grasped his small companion by the scruff of the neck and hauled him roughly to his feet.

Magee's eyes were still merry. “Well played, my lad,” he commended in clipped syllables, as they burst out the street door, '- if hardly cricket! Where did you learn La Savate?”

MacKinnon had no time to answer, being fully occupied in keeping up with Magee's weaving, deceptively rapid progress. They ducked across the street, down an alley, and between two buildings.

The succeeding minutes, or hours, were confusion to MacKinnon. He remembered afterwards crawling along a roof top and letting himself down to crouch in the blackness of an interior court, but he could not remember how they had gotten on the roof. He also recalled spending an interminable period alone, compressed inside a most unsavory refuse bin, and his terror when footsteps approached the bin and a light flashed through a crack.

A crash and the sound of footsteps in flight immediately thereafter led him to guess that Fader had drawn the pursuit away from him. But when Fader did return, and open the top of the bin, MacKinnon almost throttled him before identification was established.

When the active pursuit had been shaken off, Magee guided him across town, showing a sophisticated knowledge of back ways and shortcuts, and a genius for taking full advantage of cover. They reached the outskirts of the town in a dilapidated quarter, far from the civic center. Magee stopped. “I guess this is the end of the line,” kid,” he told Dave. “If you follow this street, you'll come to open country shortly. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?”

“I suppose so,” MacKinnon replied uneasily, and peered down the street. Then he turned back to speak again to Magee.

But Magee was gone. He had faded away into the shadows. There was neither sight nor sound of him.

MacKinnon started in the suggested direction with a heavy heart. There was no possible reason to expect Magee to stay with him; the service Dave had done him with a lucky kick had been repaid with interest-yet he had lost the only friendly companionship he had found in a strange place. He felt lonely and depressed.

He continued along, keeping to the shadows, and watching carefully for shapes that might be patrolmen. He had gone a few hundred yards, and was beginning to worry about how far it might be to open countryside, when he was startled into gooseflesh by a hiss from a dark doorway.

He did his best to repress the panic that beset him, and was telling himself that policemen never hiss, when a shadow detached itself from the blackness and touched him on the arm.

“Dave,” it said softly.

MacKinnon felt a childlike sense of relief and well-being. “Fader!”

“I changed my mind, Dave. The gendarmes would have you in tow before morning. You don't know the ropes . . . so I came back.”

Dave was both pleased and crestfallen. “Hell's bells, Fader,” he protested, 'you shouldn't worry about me. I'll get along.”

Magee shook him roughly by the arm. “Don't be a chump. Green as you are, you'd start to holler about your civil rights, or something, and get clipped in the mouth again.

“Now see here,” he went on, 'I'm going to take you to some friends of mine who will hide you until you're smartened up to the tricks around here. But they're on the wrong side of the law, see? You'll have to be all three of the three sacred monkeys-see no evil, hear no evil, tell no evil. Think you can do it?”

“Yes, but -”

“No "buts" about it. Come along!”

The entrance was in the rear of an old warehouse. Steps led down into a little sunken pit. From this open areaway-foul with accumulated refuse-a door let into the back wall of the building. Magee tapped lightly but systematically, waited and listened. Presently he whispered, 'Psst! It's the Fader.”

The door opened quickly, and Magee was encircled by two great, fat arms. He was lifted off his feet, while the owner of those arms planted a resounding buss on his cheek. “Fader!” she exclaimed, 'are you all right, lad? We've missed you.”

“Now that's a proper welcome, Mother,” he answered, when he was back on his own feet, 'but I want you to meet a friend of mine. Mother Johnston, this is David MacKinnon.”

“May I do you a service?” David acknowledged, with automatic formality, but Mother Johnston's eyes tightened with instant suspicion.

“Is he stooled?” she snapped.

“No, Mother, he's a new immigrant-but I vouch for him. He's on the dodge, and I've brought him here to cool.”

She softened a little under his sweetly persuasive tones. “Well -”

Magee pinched her cheek. “That's a good girl! When are you going to marry me?”

She slapped his hand away. “Even if I were forty years younger, I'd not marry such a scamp as you! Come along then,” she continued to MacKinnon, 'as long as you're a friend of the Fader-though it's no credit to you!” She waddled quickly ahead of them, down a flight of stairs, while calling out for someone to open the door at its foot.

The room was poorly lighted and was furnished principally with a long table and some chairs, at which an odd dozen people were seated, drinking and talking. It reminded MacKinnon of prints he had seen of old English pubs in the days before the Collapse.

Magee was greeted with a babble of boisterous welcome. “Fader!'-'It's the kid himself!'-'How d'ja do it this time,

Fader? Crawl down the drains?'-'Set 'em up, Mother-the Fader's back!"

He accepted the ovation with a wave of his hand and a shout of inclusive greeting, then turned to MacKinnon. "Folks," he said, his voice cutting through the confusion, 'I want you to know Dave-the best pal that ever kicked a jailer at the right moment. If it hadn't been for Dave, I wouldn't be here."

Dave found himself seated between two others at the table and a stein of beer thrust into his hand by a not uncomely young woman. He started to thank her, but she had hurried off to help Mother Johnston take care of the sudden influx of orders. Seated opposite him was a rather surly young man who had taken little part in the greeting to Magee. He looked MacKinnon over with a face expressionless except for a recurrent tic which caused his right eye to wink spasmodically every few seconds.

"What's your line?" he demanded.

"Leave him alone, Alec," Magee cut in swiftly, but in a friendly tone. "He's just arrived inside; I told you that. But he's all right," he continued, raising his voice to include the others present, 'he's been here less than twenty-four hours, but he's broken jail, beat up two customs busies, and sassed old Judge Fleishacker right to his face. How's that for a busy day?"

Dave was the center of approving interest, but the party with the tic persisted. "That's all very well, but I asked him a fair question: What's his line? If it's the same as mine, I won't stand for it-it's too crowded now."

"That cheap racket you're in is always crowded, but he's not in it. Forget about his line."

"Why don't he answer for himself," Alec countered suspiciously. He half stood up. "I don't believe he's stooled -"

It appeared that Magee was cleaning his nails with the point of a slender knife. "Put your nose back in your glass, Alec," he remarked in a conversational tone, without looking up, '-or must I cut it off and put it there?"

The other fingered something nervously in his hand. Magee seemed not to notice it, but nevertheless told him, 'If you think you can use a vibrator on me faster than I use steel, go ahead-it will be an interesting experiment."

The man facing him stood uncertainly for a moment longer, his tic working incessantly. Mother Johnston came up behind him and pushed him down by the shoulders, saying, 'Boys! Boys! Is that any way to behave?-and in front of a guest, too! Fader, put that toad sticker away-I'm ashamed of you."

The knife was gone from his hands. "You're right as always, Mother," he grinned. "Ask Molly to fill up my glass again."

An old chap sitting on MacKinnon's right had followed these events with alcoholic uncertainty, but he seemed to have gathered something of the gist of it, for now he fixed Dave with serum-filled eye, and enquired, 'Boy, are you stooled to the rogue?" His sweetly sour breath reached MacKinnon as the old man leaned toward him and emphasized his question with a trembling, joint-swollen finger.

Dave looked to Magee for advice and enlightenment. Magee answered for him. "No, he's not-Mother Johnston knew that when she let him in. He's here for sanctuary-as our customs provide!"

An uneasy stir ran around the room. Molly paused in her serving and listened openly. But the old man seemed satisfied. "True . . . true enough," he agreed, and took another pull at his drink, 'sanctuary may be given when needed, if-'His words were lost in a mumble.

The nervous tension slackened. Most of those present were subconsciously glad to follow the lead of the old man, and excuse the intrusion on the score of necessity. Magee turned back to Dave. "I thought that what you didn't know couldn't hurt you-or us-but the matter has been opened."

"But what did he mean?"

"Gramps asked you if you had been stooled to the rogue-whether or not you were a member of the ancient and honorable fraternity of thieves, cutthroats, and pickpockets!"

Magee stared into Dave's face with a look of sardonic amusement. Dave looked uncertainly from Magee to the others, saw them exchange glances, and wondered what answer was expected of him. Alec broke the pause. "Well," he sneered, 'what are you waiting for? Go ahead and put the question to him-or are the great Fader's friends free to use this club without so much as a by-your-leave?"

“I thought I told you to quiet down, Alec,” the Fader replied evenly. “Besides-you're skipping a requirement. All the comrades present must first decide whether or not to put the question at all.”

A quiet little man with a chronic worried look in his eyes answered him. “I don't think that quite applies, Fader. If he had come himself, or fallen into our hands-in that case, yes. But you brought him here. I think I speak for all when I say he should answer the question. Unless someone objects, I will ask him myself.” He allowed an interval to pass. No one spoke up. “Very well then . . . Dave, you have seen too much and heard too much. Will you leave us now-or will you stay and take the oath of our guild? I must warn you that once stooled you are stooled for life-and there is but one punishment for betraying the rogue.”

He drew his thumb across his throat in an age-old deadly gesture. Gramps made an appropriate sound effect by sucking air wetly through his teeth, and chuckled.

Dave looked around. Magee's face gave him no help. “What is it that I have to swear to?” he temporized.

The parley was brought to an abrupt ending by the sound of pounding outside. There was a shout, muffled by two closed doors and a stairway, of 'Open up down there!” Magee got lightly to his feet and beckoned to Dave.

“That's for us, kid,” he said. “Come along.”

He stepped over to a ponderous, old-fashioned radiophonograph which stood against the wall, reached under it, fiddled for a moment, then swung out one side panel of it. Dave saw that the mechanism had been cunningly rearranged in such a fashion that a man could squeeze inside it. Magee urged him into it, slammed the panel closed, and left him.

His face was pressed up close to the slotted grill which was intended to cover the sound box. Molly had cleared off the two extra glasses from the table, and was dumping one drink so that it spread along the table top and erased the rings their glasses had made.

MacKinnon saw the Fader slide under the table, and reached up. Then he was gone. Apparently he had, in some fashion, attached himself to the underside of the table.

Mother Johnston made a great-to-do of opening up. The lower door she opened at once, with much noise. Then she clumped slowly up the steps, pausing, wheezing, and complaining aloud. He heard her unlock the outer door.

"A fine time to be waking honest people up!" she protested. "It's hard enough to get the work done and make both ends meet, without dropping what I'm doing every five minutes, and -"

"Enough of that, old girl," a man's voice answered, 'just get along downstairs. We have business with you."

"What sort of business?" she demanded.

"It might be selling liquor without a license, but it's not-this time."

"I don't-this is a private club. The members own the liquor; I simply serve it to them."

"That's as may be. It's those members I want to talk to. Get out of the way now, and be spry about it."

They came pushing into the room with Mother Johnston, still voluble, carried along in by the van. The speaker was a sergeant of police; he was accompanied by a patrolman. Following them were two other uniformed men, but they were soldiers. MacKinnon judged by the markings on their kilts that they were corporal and private-provided the insignia in New America were similar to those used by the United States Army.

The sergeant paid no attention to Mother Johnston. "All right, you men," he called out, 'line up!"

They did so, ungraciously but promptly. Molly and Mother Johnston watched them, and moved closer to each other. The police sergeant called out, 'All right, corporal-take charge!"

The boy who washed up in the kitchen had been staring round-eyed. He dropped a glass. It bounced around on the hard floor, giving out bell-like sounds in the silence.

The man who had questioned Dave spoke up. "What's all this?"

The sergeant answered with a pleased grin.

“Conscription-that's what it is. You are all enlisted in the army for the duration.”

“Press gang!” It was an involuntary gasp that came from no particular source.

The corporal stepped briskly forward. “Form a column of twos,” he directed. But the little man with the worried eyes was not done.

“I don't understand this,” he objected. “We signed an armistice with the Free State three weeks ago.”

“That's not your worry,” countered the sergeant, 'nor mine. We are picking up every able-bodied man not in essential industry. Come along.”

“Then you can't take me.”

“Why not?”

He held up the stump of a missing hand. The sergeant glanced from it to the corporal, who nodded grudgingly, and said, 'Okay-but report to the office in the morning, and register.”

He started to march them out when Alec broke ranks and backed up to the wall, screaming, 'You can't do this to me! I won't go!” His deadly little vibrator was exposed in his hand, and the right side of his face was drawn up in a spastic wink that left his teeth bare.

“Get him, Steeves,” ordered the corporal. The private stepped forward, but stopped when Alec brandished the vibrator at him. He had no desire to have a vibroblade between his ribs, and there was no doubt as to the uncontrolled dangerousness of his hysterical opponent.

The corporal, looking phlegmatic, almost bored, levelled a small tube at a spot on the wall over Alec's head. Dave heard a soft pop!, and a thin tinkle. Alec stood motionless for a few seconds, his face even more strained, as if he were exerting the limit of his will against some unseen force, then slid quietly to the floor. The tonic spasm in his face relaxed, and his features smoothed into those of a tired and petulant, and very bewildered, little boy.

“Two of you birds carry him,” directed the corporal. “Let's get going.”

The sergeant was the last to leave. He turned at the door and spoke to Mother Johnston. “Have you seen the Fader lately?”

“The Fader?” She seemed puzzled. “Why, he's in jail.”

“Ah, yes.. . . so he is.” He went out.

Magee refused the drink that Mother Johnston offered him.

Dave was surprised to see that he appeared worried for the first time. “I don't understand it,” Magee muttered, half to himself, then addressed the one-handed man. “Ed-bring me up to date.”

“Not much news since they tagged you, Fader. The armistice was before that. I thought from the papers that things were going to be straightened out for once.”

“So did I. But the government must expect war if they are going in for general conscription.” He stood up. “I've got to have more data. Al!” The kitchen boy stuck his head into the room.

“What 'cha want, Fader?”

“Go out and make palaver with five or six of the beggars. Look up their "king". You know where he makes his pitch?”

“Sure-over by the auditorium.”

“Find out what's stirring, but don't let them know I sent you.,

“Right, Fader. It's in the bag.” The boy swaggered out.

“Molly.”

“Yes, Fader?”

“Will you go out, and do the same thing with some of the business girls? I want to know what they hear from their customers.” She nodded agreement. He went on, 'Better look up that little redhead that has her beat up on Union Square. She can get secrets out of a dead man. Here-” He pulled a wad of bills out of his pocket and handed her several. “You better take this grease . . . You might have to pay off a cop to get back out of the district.”

Magee was not disposed to talk, and insisted that Dave get some sleep. He was easily persuaded, not having slept since he entered Coventry. That seemed like a lifetime past; he was exhausted. Mother Johnston fixed him a shakedown in a dark, stuffy room on the same underground level. It had none of the hygienic comforts to which he was accustomed-air-conditioning, restful music, hydraulic mattress, nor soundproofing-and he missed his usual relaxing soak and auto-massage, but he was too tired to care. He slept in clothing and under covers for the first time in his life.

He woke up with a headache, a taste in his mouth like tired sin, and a sense of impending disaster. At first he could not remember where he was-he thought he was still in detention Outside. His surrounds were inexplicably sordid; he was about to ring for the attendant and complain, when his memory pieced in the events of the day before. Then he got up and discovered that his bones and muscles were painfully sore, and-which was worse-that he was, by his standards, filthy dirty. He itched.

He entered the common room, and found Magee sitting at the table. He greeted Dave. “Hi, kid. I was about to wake you. You've slept almost all day. We've got a lot to talk about.”

“Okay-shortly. Where's the 'fresher?”

“Over there.”

It was not Dave's idea of a refreshing chamber, but he managed to take a sketchy shower in spite of the slimy floor. Then he discovered that there was no air blast installed, and he was forced to dry himself unsatisfactorily with his handkerchief. He had no choice in clothes. He must put back on the ones he had taken off, or go naked. He recalled that he had seen no nudity anywhere in Coventry, even at sports-a difference in customs, no doubt.

He put his clothes back on, though his skin crawled at the touch of the once-used linen.

But Mother Johnston had thrown together an appetizing breakfast for him. He let coffee restore his courage as Magee talked. It was, according to Fader, a serious situation. New America and the Free State had compromised their differences and had formed an alliance. They quite seriously proposed to break out of Coventry and attack the United States.

MacKinnon looked up at this. “That's ridiculous, isn't it?

They would be outnumbered enormously. Besides, how about the Barrier?"

"I don't know-yet. But they have some reason to think that they can break through the Barrier . . . and there are rumors that whatever it is can be used as a weapon, too, so that a small army might be able to whip the whole United States."

MacKinnon looked puzzled. "Well," he observed, 'I haven't any opinion of a weapon I know nothing about, but as to the Barrier . . . I'm not a mathematical physicist, but I was always told that it was theoretically impossible to break the Barrier-that it was just a nothingness that there was no way to touch. Of course, you can fly over it, but even that is supposed to be deadly to life."

"Suppose they had found some way to shield from the effects of the Barrier's field?" suggested Magee. "Anyhow, that's not the point, for us. The point is: they've made this combine; the Free State supplies the techniques and most of the officers; and New America, with its bigger population, supplies most of the men. And that means to us that we don't dare show our faces any place, or we are in the army before you can blink.

"Which brings me to what I was going to suggest. I'm going to duck out of here as soon as it gets dark, and light out for the Gateway, before they send somebody after me who is bright enough to look under a table. I thought maybe you might want to come along."

"Back to the psychologists?" MacKinnon was honestly aghast.

"Sure-why not? What have you got to lose? This whole damn place is going to be just like the Free State in a couple of days-and a Joe of your temperament would be in hot water all the time. What's so bad about a nice, quiet hospital room as a place to hide out until things quiet down? You don't have to pay any attention to the psych boys-just make animal noises at 'em every time one sticks his nose into your room, until they get discouraged."

Dave shook his head. "No," he said slowly, 'I can't do that."

"Then what will you do?"

"I don't know yet. Take to the hills I guess. Go to live with the Angels if it comes to a showdown. I wouldn't mind them

praying for my soul as long as they left my mind alone."

They were each silent for a while. Magee was mildly annoyed at MacKinnon's bullheaded stubbornness in the face of what seemed to him a reasonable offer. Dave continued busily to stow away grilled ham, while considering his position. He cut off another bite. "My, but this is good," he remarked, to break the awkward silence, 'I don't know when I've had anything taste so good-Say!'-

"What?" inquired Magee, looking up, and seeing the concern written on MacKinnon's face.

"This ham-is it synthetic, or is it real meat?"

"Why, it's real. What about it?"

Dave did not answer. He managed to reach the refreshing room before that which he had eaten departed from him.

Before he left, Magee gave Dave some money with which he could have purchased for him things that he would need in order to take to the hills. MacKinnon protested, but the Fader cut him short. "Quit being a damn fool, Dave. I can't use New American money on the Outside, and you can't stay alive in the hills without proper equipment. You lie doggo here for a few days while Al, or Molly, picks up what you need, and you'll stand a chance-unless you'll change your mind and come with me?"

Dave shook his head at this, and accepted the money.

It was lonely after Magee left. Mother Johnston and Dave were alone in the club, and the empty chairs reminded him depressingly of the men who had been impressed. He wished that Gramps or the one-handed man would show up. Even Alec, with his nasty temper, would have been company-he wondered if Alec had been punished for resisting the draft.

Mother Johnston inveigled him into playing checkers in an attempt to relieve his evident low spirits. He felt obliged to agree to her gentle conspiracy, but his mind wandered. It was all very well for the Senior Judge to tell him to seek adventure in interplanetary exploration, but only engineers and technicians were eligible for such billets. Perhaps he should have gone in for science, or engineering, instead of literature; then he might now be on Venus, contending against the forces of nature in high adventure, instead of hiding from uniformed bullies. It wasn't fair. No-he must not kid himself; there was

no room for an expert in literary history in the raw frontier of the planets; that was not human injustice, that was a hard fact of nature, and he might as well face it.

He thought bitterly of the man whose nose he had broken, and thereby landed himself in Coventry. Maybe he was an 'upholstered parasite" after all-but the recollection of the phrase brought back the same unreasoning anger that had gotten him into trouble. He was glad that he had socked that so-and-so! What right had he to go around sneering and calling people things like that?

He found himself thinking in the same vindictive spirit of his father, although he would have been at a loss to explain the connection. The connection was not superficially evident, for his father would never have stooped to name-calling. Instead, he would have offered the sweetest of smiles, and quoted something nauseating in the way of sweetness-and light. Dave's father was one of the nastiest little tyrants that ever dominated a household under the guise of loving-kindness. He was of the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger, this-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you school, and all his life had invariably been able to find an altruistic rationalization for always having his own way. Convinced of his own infallible righteousness, he had never valued his son's point of view on anything, but had dominated him in everything-always from the highest moralistic motives.

He had had two main bad effects on his son: the boy's natural independence, crushed at home, rebelled blindly at every sort of discipline, authority, or criticism which he encountered elsewhere and subconsciously identified with the not-to-be-criticized paternal authority. Secondly, through years of association Dave imitated his father's most dangerous social vice-that of passing unselfcritical moral judgments on the actions of others.

When Dave was arrested for breaking a basic custom; to wit, atavistic violence; his father washed his hands of him with the statement that he had tried his best to 'make a man of him', and could not be blamed for his son's failure to profit by his instruction.

A faint knock caused them to put away the checker board in a hurry. Mother Johnston paused before answering. “That's not our knock,” she considered, 'but it's not loud enough to be the noises. Be ready to hide.”

MacKinnon waited by the fox hole where he had hidden the night before, while Mother Johnston went to investigate. He heard

her unbar and unlock the upper door, then she called out to him in a low but urgent voice, 'Dave! Come here, Dave-hurry!"

It was Fader, unconscious, with his own bloody trail behind him.

Mother Johnston was attempting to pick up the limp form. MacKinnon crowded in, and between the two of them they managed to get him downstairs and to lay him on the long table. He came to for a moment as they straightened his limbs. "Hi, Dave," he whispered, managing to achieve the ghost of his debonair grin. "Somebody trumped my ace."

"You keep quiet!" Mother Johnston snapped at him, then in a lower voice to Dave, 'Oh, the poor darling-Dave, we must get him to the Doctor."

"Can't . . . do . . . that," muttered the Fader. "Got . . . to get to the . . . Gate-" His voice trailed off. Mother Johnston's fingers had been busy all the while, as if activated by some separate intelligence. A small pair of scissors, drawn from some hiding place about her large person, clipped away at his clothing, exposing the superficial extent of the damage. She examined the trauma critically.

"This is no job for me," she decided, 'and he must sleep while we move him. Dave, get that hypodermic kit out of the medicine chest in the 'fresher."

"No, Mother!" It was Magee, his voice strong and vibrant.

"Get me a pepper pill," he went on. "There's -, 'But Fader -"

He cut her short. "I've got to get to the Doctor all right, but how the devil will I get there if I don't walk?"

"We would carry you."

"Thanks, Mother," he told her, his voice softened. "I know you would-but the police would be curious. Get me that pill."

Dave followed her into the 'fresher, and questioned her while she rummaged through the medicine chest. "Why don't we just send for a doctor?"

“There is only one doctor we can trust, and that's the Doctor. Besides, none of the others are worth the powder to blast them.”

Magee was out again when they came back into the room. Mother Johnston slapped his face until he came around, blinking and cursing. Then she fed him the pill.

The powerful stimulant, improbable offspring of common coal tar, took hold almost at once. To all surface appearance Magee was a well man. He sat up and tried his own pulse, searching it out in his left wrist with steady, sensitive fingers. “Regular as a metronome,” he announced, 'the old ticker can stand that dosage all right.”

He waited while Mother Johnston applied sterile packs to his wounds, then said good-bye. MacKinnon looked at Mother Johnston. She nodded.

“I'm going with you,” he told the Fader.

“What for? It will just double the risk.”

“You're in no fit shape to travel alone-stimulant, or no stimulant.”

“Nuts. I'd have to look after you.”

“I'm going with you.”

Magee shrugged his shoulders and capitulated.

Mother Johnston wiped her perspiring face, and kissed both of them.

Until they were well out of town their progress reminded MacKinnon of their nightmare flight of the previous evening. Thereafter they continued to the north-northwest by a highway which ran toward the foothills, and they left the highway only when necessary to avoid the sparse traffic. Once they were almost surprised by a police patrol car, equipped with blacklight and almost invisible, but the Fader sensed it in time and they crouched behind a low wall which separated the adjacent field from the road.

Dave inquired how he had known the patrol was near. Magee chuckled. “Damned if I know,” he said, 'but I believe I could

smell a cop staked out in a herd of goats."

The Fader talked less and less as the night progressed. His usually untroubled countenance became lined and old as the effect of the drug wore off. It seemed to Dave as if this unaccustomed expression gave him a clearer insight into the man's character-that the mask of pain was his true face rather than the unworried features Magee habitually showed the world. He wondered for the ninth time what the Fader had done to cause a court to adjudge him socially insane.

This question was uppermost in his mind with respect to every person he met in Coventry. The answer was obvious in most cases; their types of instability were gross and showed up at once. Mother Johnston had been an enigma until she had explained it herself. She had followed her husband into Coventry. Now that she was a widow, she preferred to remain with the friends she knew and the customs and conditions she was adjusted to, rather than change for -another and possibly less pleasing environment.

Magee sat down beside the road. "It's no use, kid," he admitted, 'I can't make it."

"The hell we can't. I'll carry you."

Magee grinned faintly. "No, I mean it." Dave persisted. "How much farther is it?"

"Matter of two or three miles, maybe."

"Climb aboard." He took Magee pickaback and started on. The first few hundred yards were not too difficult; Magee was forty pounds lighter than Dave. After that the strain of the additional load began to tell. His arms cramped from supporting Magee's knees; his arches complained at the weight and the unnatural load distribution; and his breathing was made difficult by the clasp of Magee's arms around his neck.

Two miles to go-maybe more. Let your weight fall forward, and your foot must follow it, else you fall to the ground. It's automatic-as automatic as pulling teeth. How long is a mile? Nothing in a rocket ship, thirty seconds in a pleasure car, a ten minute crawl in a steel snail, fifteen minutes to trained troops in good condition. How far is it with a man on your back, on a rough road, when you are tired to start with?

Five thousand, two hundred, and eighty feet-a meaningless figure. But every step takes twenty-four inches off the total. The remainder is still incomprehensible-an infinity. Count them. Count them till you go crazy-till the figures speak themselves outside your head, and the jar! . . . jar! ...jar! . . . of your enormous, benumbed feet beats in your brain. Count them backwards, subtracting two each time-no, that's worse; each remainder is still an unattainable, inconceivable figure.

His world closed in, lost its history and held no future. There was nothing, nothing at all, but the torturing necessity of picking up his foot again and placing it forward. No feeling but the heartbreaking expenditure of will necessary to achieve that meaningless act.

He was brought suddenly to awareness when Magee's arms relaxed from around his neck. He leaned forward, and dropped to one knee to keep from spilling his burden, then eased it slowly to the ground. He thought for a moment that the Fader was dead-he could not locate his pulse, and the slack face and limp body were sufficiently corpse-like, but he pressed an ear to Magee's chest, and heard with relief the steady flub-dub of his heart.

He tied Magee's wrists together with his handkerchief, and forced his own head through the encircled arms. But he was unable, in his exhausted condition, to wrestle the slack weight into position on his back. Fader regained consciousness while MacKinnon was struggling. His first words were, 'Take it easy, Dave. What's the trouble?”

Dave explained. “Better untie my wrists,” advised the Fader, 'I think I can walk for a while.”

And walk he did, for nearly three hundred yards, before he was forced to give up again. “Look, Dave,” he said, after he had partially recovered, 'did you bring along any more of those pepper pills?”

“Yes-but you can't take any more dosage. It would kill you.”

“Yeah, I know-so they say. But that isn't the idea-yet. I was going to suggest that you might take one.”

“Why, of course! Good grief, Fader, but I'm dumb.”

Magee seemed no heavier than a light coat, the morning star shone brighter, and his strength seemed inexhaustible. Even when they left the highway and started up the cart trail that led to the Doctor's home in the foothills, the going was tolerable and the burden not too great. MacKinnon knew that the drugs burned the working tissue of his body long after his proper reserves were gone, and that it would take him days to recover from the reckless expenditure, but he did not mind. No price was too high to pay for the moment when he at last arrived at the gate of the Doctor's home-on his own two feet, his charge alive and conscious.

MacKinnon was not allowed to see Magee for four days. In the meantime, he was encouraged to keep the routine of a semi-invalid himself in order to recover the twenty-five pounds he had lost in two days and two nights, and to make up for the heavy strain on his heart during the last night. A high-caloric diet, sun baths, rest, and peaceful surroundings plus his natural good health caused him to regain weight and strength rapidly, but he 'enjoyed ill health" exceedingly because of the companionship of the Doctor himself-and Persephone.

Persephone's calendar age was fifteen. Dave never knew whether to think of her as much older, or much younger. She had been born in Coventry, and had lived her short life in the house of the Doctor, her mother having died in childbirth in that same house. She was completely childlike in many respects, being without experience in the civilized world Outside, and having had very little contact with the inhabitants of Coventry, except when she saw them as patients of the Doctor. But she had been allowed to read unchecked from the library of a sophisticated and protean-minded man of science. MacKinnon was continually being surprised at the extent of her academic and scientific knowledge-much greater than his own. She made him feel as if he were conversing with some aged and omniscient matriarch, then she would come out with some naive concept of the outer world, and he would be brought up sharply with the realization that she was, in fact, an inexperienced child.

He was mildly romantic about her, not seriously, of course, in view of her barely nubile age, but she was pleasant to see, and he was hungry for feminine companionship. He was quite young enough himself to feel continual interest in the delightful differences, mental and physical, between male and female.

Consequently, it was a blow to his pride as sharp as had

been the sentence to Coventry to discover that she classed him with the other inhabitants of Coventry as a poor unfortunate who needed help and sympathy because he was not quite right in his head.

He was furious and for one whole day he sulked alone, but the human necessity for self-justification and approval forced him to seek her out and attempt to reason with her. He explained carefully and with emotional candor the circumstances leading up to his trial and conviction, and embellished the account with his own philosophy and evaluations, then confidently awaited her approval.

It was not forthcoming. “I don't understand your viewpoint,” she said. “You broke his nose, yet he had done you no harm of any sort. You expect me to approve that?”

“But Persephone,” he protested, 'you ignore the fact that he called me a most insulting name.”

“I don't see the connection,” she said. “He made a noise with his mouth-a verbal label. If the label does not fit you, the noise is meaningless. If the label is true in your case-if you are the thing that the noise refers to, you are neither more, nor less, that thing by reason of some one uttering the verbal label. In short, he did not damage you.

“But what you did to him was another matter entirely. You broke his nose. That is damage. In self-protection the rest of society must seek you out, and determine whether or not you are so unstable as to be likely to damage some one else in the future. If you are, you must be quarantined for treatment, or leave society-whichever you prefer.”

“You think I'm crazy, don't you?” he accused.

“Crazy? Not the way you mean it. You haven't paresis, or a brain tumor, or any other lesion that the Doctor could find. But from the viewpoint of your semantic reactions you are as socially unsane as any fanatic witch burner.”

“Come now-that's not just!”

“What is justice?” She picked up the kitten she had been playing with. “I'm going in-it's getting chilly.” Off she went into the house, her bare feet noiseless in the grass.

Had the science of semantics developed as rapidly as psychodynamics and its implementing arts of propaganda and mob psychology, the United States might never have fallen into dictatorship, then been forced to undergo the Second Revolution. All of the scientific principles embodied in the Covenant which marked the end of the revolution were formulated as far back as the first quarter of the twentieth century.

But the work of the pioneer semanticists, C. K. Ogden, Alfred Korzybski, and others, were known to but a handful of students, whereas psycho-dynamics, under the impetus of repeated wars and the frenzy of high-pressure merchandising, progressed by leaps and bounds.

Semantics, 'the meaning of meaning', gave a method for the first time of applying the scientific method to every act of everyday life. Because semantics dealt with spoken and written words as a determining aspect of human behavior it was at first mistakenly thought by many to be concerned only with words and of interest only to professional word manipulators, such as advertising copy writers and professors of etymology. A handful of unorthodox psychiatrists attempted to apply it to personal human problems, but their work was swept away by the epidemic mass psychoses that destroyed Europe and returned the United States to the Dark Ages.

The Covenant was the first scientific social document ever drawn up by man, and due credit must be given to its principal author, Dr Micah Novak, the same Novak who served as staff psychologist in the revolution. The revolutionists wished to establish maximum personal liberty. How could they accomplish that to a degree of high mathematical probability? First they junked the concept of 'justice'. Examined semantically 'justice" has no referent-there is no observable phenomenon in the space-time-matter continuum to which one can point, and say, 'This is justice." Science can deal only with that which can be observed and measured. Justice is not such a matter; therefore it can never have the same meaning to one as to another; any 'noises" said about it will only add to confusion.

But damage, physical or economic, can be pointed to and measured. Citizens were forbidden by the Covenant to damage another. Any act not leading to damage, physical or economic, to some particular person, they declared to be lawful.

Since they had abandoned the concept of 'justice', there

could be no rational standards of punishment. Penology took its place with lycanthropy and other forgotten witchcrafts. Yet, since it was not practical to permit a source of danger to remain in the community, social offenders were examined and potential repeaters were given their choice of psychological readjustment, or of having society withdraw itself from them-Coventry.

Early drafts of the Covenant contained the assumption that the socially unsane would naturally be hospitalized and readjusted, particularly since current psychiatry was quite competent to cure all non-lesional psychoses and cure or alleviate lesional psychoses, but Novak set his face against this.

"No!" he protested. "The government must never again be permitted to tamper with the mind of any citizen without his consent, or else we set up a greater tyranny than we had before. Every man must be free to accept, or reject, the Covenant, even though we think him insane!"

The next time David MacKinnon looked up Persephone he found her in a state of extreme agitation. His own wounded pride was forgotten at once. "Why, my dear," he said, 'whatever in the world is the matter?"

Gradually he gathered that she had been present at a conversation between Magee and the Doctor, and had heard, for the first time, of the impending military operation against the United States. He patted her hand. "So that's all it is," he observed in a relieved voice. "I thought something was wrong with you yourself."

"'"That's all-" David MacKinnon, do you mean to stand there and tell me that you knew about this, and don't consider it worth worrying about?"

"Me? Why should I? And for that matter, what could I do?"

"What could you do? You could go outside and warn them-that's what you could do . . . As to why you should-Dave, you're impossible!" She burst into tears and ran from the room.

He stared after her, mouth open, then borrowed from his remotest ancestor by observing to himself that women are hard to figure out.

Persephone did not appear at lunch. MacKinnon asked the Doctor where she was.

"Had her lunch," the Doctor told him, between mouthfuls. "Started for the Gateway."

"What! Why did you let her do that?"

"Free agent. Wouldn't have obeyed me anyway. She'll be all right."

Dave did not hear the last, being already out of the room and running out of the house. He found her just backing her little motorcycle runabout out of its shed. "Persephone!"

"What do you want?" she asked with frozen dignity beyond her years.

"You mustn't do this! That's where the Fader got hurt!"

"I am going. Please stand aside."

"Then I'm going with you."

"Why should you?"

"To take care of you."

She sniffed. "As if anyone would dare to touch me."

There was a measure of truth in what she said. The Doctor, and every member of his household, enjoyed a personal immunity unlike that of anyone else in Coventry. As a natural consequence of the set-up, Coventry had almost no competent medical men. The number of physicians who committed social damage was small. The proportion of such who declined psychiatric treatment was negligible, and this negligible remainder were almost sure to be unreliable bunglers in their profession. The Doctor was a natural healer, in voluntary exile in order that he might enjoy the opportunity to practice his art in the richest available field. He cared nothing for dry research; what he wanted was patients, the sicker the better, that he might make them well again.

He was above custom and above law. In the Free State the Liberator depended on him for insulin to hold his own death from diabetes at arm's length. In New America his beneficiaries were

equally powerful. Even among the Angels of the Lord the Prophet himself accepted the dicta of the Doctor without question.

But MacKinnon was not satisfied. Some ignorant fool, he was afraid, might do the child some harm without realizing her protected status. He got no further chance to protest; she started the little runabout suddenly, and forced him to jump out of its path. When he had recovered his balance, she was far down the lane. He could not catch her.

She was back in less than four hours. He had expected that; if a person as elusive as Fader had not been able to reach the Gate at night, it was not likely that a young girl could do so in daylight.

His first feeling was one of simple relief, then he eagerly awaited an opportunity to speak to her. During her absence he had been turning over the situation in his mind. It was a foregone conclusion that she would fail; he wished to rehabilitate himself in her eyes; therefore, he would help her in the project nearest her heart-he himself would carry the warning to the Outside!

Perhaps she would ask for such help. In fact, it seemed likely. But the time she returned he had convinced himself that she was certain to ask his help. He would agree-with simple dignity-and off he would go, perhaps to be wounded, or killed, but an heroic figure, even if he failed.

He pictured himself subconsciously as a blend of Sydney Carton, the White Knight, the man who carried the message to Garcia and just a dash of d'Artagnan.

But she did not ask him-she would not even give him a chance to talk with her.

She did not appear at dinner. After dinner she was closeted with the Doctor in his study. When she reappeared she went directly to her room. He finally concluded that he might as well go to bed himself.

To bed, and then to sleep, and take it up again in the morning-But it's not as simple as that. The unfriendly walls stared back at him, and the other, critical half of his mind decided to make a night of it. Fool! She doesn't want your help. Why should she? What have you got that Fader hasn't got?-and better. To her, you are just one of the screwloose multitude you've seen all around you in this

place.

But I'm not crazy!-just because I choose not to submit to the dictation of others doesn't make me crazy. Doesn't it, though? All the rest of them in here are lamebrains, what's so fancy about you? Not all of them-how about the Doctor, and-don't kid yourself, chump, the Doctor and Mother Johnston are here for their own reasons; they weren't sentenced. And Persephone was born here.

How about Magee?-He was certainly rational-or seemed so. He found himself resenting, with illogical bitterness, Magee's apparent stability. Why should he be any different from the rest of us?

The rest of us? He had classed himself with the other inhabitants of Coventry. All right, all right, admit it, you fool-you're just like the rest of them; turned out because the decent people won't have you-and too damned stubborn to admit that you need treatment. But the thought of treatment turned him cold, and made him think of his father again. Why should that be? He recalled something the Doctor had said to him a couple of days before:

“What you need, son, is to stand up to your father and tell him off. Pity more children don't tell their parents to go to hell!”

He turned on the light and tried to read. But it was no use. Why should Persephonie care what happened to the people Outside?-She didn't know them; she had no friends there. If he had no obligations to them, how could she possibly care? No obligations? You had a soft, easy life for many years-all they asked was that you behave yourself. For that matter, where would you be now, if the Doctor had stopped to ask whether or not he owed you anything?

He was still wearily chewing the bitter cud of self-examination when the first cold and colorless light of morning filtered in. He got up, threw a robe around him, and tiptoed down the hall to Magee's room. The door was ajar. He stuck his head in, and whispered, 'Fader-Are you awake?”

“Come in, kid,” Magee answered quietly. “What's the trouble? No can sleep?”

“No -, 'Neither can I. Sit down, and we'll carry the banner together.”

“Fader, I'm going to make a break for it. I'm going Outside.”

“Huh? When?”

“Right away.”

“Risky business, kid. Wait a few days, and I'll try it with you.”

“No, I can't wait for you to get well. I'm going out to warn the United States!”

Magee's eyed widened a little, but his voice was unchanged. “You haven't let that spindly kid sell you a bill of goods, Dave?”

“No. Not exactly. I'm doing this for myself-It's something I need to do. See here, Fader, what about this weapon? Have they really got something that could threaten the United States?”

“I'm afraid so,” Magee admitted. “I don't know much about it, but it makes blasters look sick. More range-I don't know what they expect to do about the Barrier, but I saw 'em stringing heavy power lines before I got winged. Say, if you do get outside, here's a chap you might look up; in fact, be sure to. He's got influence.” Magee scrawled something on a scrap of paper, folded the scrap, and handed it to MacKinnon, who pocketed it absent-mindedly and went on:

“How closely is the Gate guarded, Fader?”

“You can't get out the Gate; that's out of the question. Here's what you will have to do-” He tore off another piece of paper and commenced sketching and explaining.

Dave shook hands with Magee before he left. “You'll say goodbye for me, won't you? And thank the Doctor? I'd rather just slide out before anyone is up.”

“Of course, kid,” the Fader assured him.

MacKinnon crouched behind bushes and peered cautiously at the little band of Angels filing into the bleak, ugly church. He shivered, both from fear and from the icy morning air. But his need was greater than his fear. Those zealots had food-and he must have it.

The first two days after he left the house of the Doctor had been easy enough. True, he had caught cold from sleeping on the ground; it had settled in his lungs and slowed him down. But he did not mind that now if only he could refrain from sneezing or coughing until the little band of faithful were safe inside the temple. He watched them pass-dour-looking men, women and skirts that dragged the ground and whose work lined faces were framed in shawls-sallow drudges with too many children. The light had gone out of their faces. Even the children were sober.

The last of them filed inside, leaving only the sexton in the churchyard, busy with some obscure duty. After an interminable time, during which MacKinnon pressed a finger against his upper lip in a frantic attempt to forestall a sneeze, the sexton entered the grim building and closed the doors.

McKinnon crept out of his hiding place and hurried to the house he had previously selected, on the edge of the clearing, farthest from the church.

The dog was suspicious, but he quieted him. The house was locked, but the rear door could be forced. He was a little giddy at the sight of food when he found it-hard bread, and strong, unsalted butter made from goat's milk. A misstep two days before had landed him in a mountain stream. The mishap had not seemed important until he discovered that his food tablets were a pulpy mess. He had eaten them the rest of the day, then mold had taken them, and he had thrown the remainder away.

The bread lasted him through three more sleeps, but the butter melted and he was unable to carry it. He soaked as much of it as he could into the bread, then licked up the rest, after which he was very thirsty.

Some hours after the last of the bread was gone, he reached his first objective-the main river to which all other streams in Coventry were tributary. Some place, down stream, it dived under the black curtain of the Barrier, and continued seaward. With the gateway closed and guarded, its outlet constituted the only possible egress to a man unassisted.

In the meantime it was water, and thirst was upon him again, and his cold was worse. But he would have to wait until dark to drink; there were figures down there by the bank-some in uniform, he thought. One of them made fast a little skiff to a landing. He marked it

for his own and watched it with jealous eyes. It was still there when the sun went down.

The early morning sun struck his nose and he sneezed. He came wide awake, raised his head, and looked around. The little skiff he had appropriated floated in midstream. There were no oars. He could not remember whether or not there had been any oars. The current was fairly strong; it seemed as if he should have drifted clear to the Barrier in the night. Perhaps he had passed under it-no, that was ridiculous.

Then he saw it, less than a mile away, black and ominous-but the most welcome sight he had seen in days. He was too weak and feverish to enjoy it, but it renewed the determination that kept him going.

The little boat scraped against bottom. He saw that the current at a bend had brought him to the bank. He hopped awkwardly out, his congealed joints complaining, and drew the bow of the skiff up onto the sand. Then he thought better of it, pushed it out once more, shoved as hard as he was able and watched it disappear around the meander. No need to advertise where he had landed.

He slept most of that day, rousing himself once to move out of the sun when it grew too hot. But the sun had cooked much of the cold out of his bones, and he felt much better by nightfall.

Although the Barrier was only a mile or so away, it took most of the night to reach it by following the river bank. He knew when he had reached it by the clouds of steam that rose from the water. When the sun came up, he considered the situation. The Barrier stretched across the water, but the juncture between it and the surface of the stream was hidden by billowing clouds. Someplace, down under the surface of the water-how far down he did not know-somewhere down there, the Barrier ceased, and its raw edge turned the water it touched to steam.

Slowly, reluctantly and most unheroically, he commenced to strip off his clothes. The time had come and he did not relish it. He came across the scrap of paper that Magee had handed him, and attempted to examine it. But it had been pulped by his involuntary dip in the mountain stream and was quite illegible. He chucked it away. It did not seem to matter.

He shivered as he stood hesitating on the bank,

although the sun was warm. Then his mind was made up for him; he spied a patrol on the far bank.

Perhaps they had seen him, perhaps not. He dived.

Down, down, as far as his strength would take him. Down and try to touch bottom, to be sure of avoiding that searing, deadly base. He felt mud with his hands. Now to swim under it. Perhaps it was death to pass under it, as well as over it; he would soon know. But which way was it? There was no direction down here.

He stayed down until his congested lungs refused. Then he rose part way, and felt scalding water on his face. For a timeless interval of unutterable sorrow and loneliness he realized that he was trapped between heat and water-trapped under the Barrier.

Two private soldiers gossiped idly on a small dock which lay under the face of the Barrier. The river which poured out from beneath it held no interest for them, they had watched it for many dull tours of guard duty. An alarm clanged behind them and brought them to alertness. “What sector, Jack?”

“This bank. There he is now-see!”

They fished him out and had him spread out on the dock by the time the sergeant of the guard arrived. “Alive, or dead?” he enquired.

“Dead, I think,” answered the one who was not busy giving artificial resuscitation.

The sergeant clucked in a manner incongruous to his battered face, and said, 'Too bad. I've ordered the ambulance; send him up to the infirmary anyhow.”

The nurse tried to keep him quiet, but MacKinnon made such an uproar that she was forced to get the ward surgeon. “Here! Here! What's all this nonsense?” the medico rebuked him, while reaching for his pulse. Dave managed to convince him that he would not quiet down, not accept a soporific until he had told his story. They struck a working agreement that MacKinnon was to be allowed to talk-'But keep it short, mind you!'-and the doctor would pass the word along to his next superior, and in return Dave would submit to a hypodermic.

The next morning two other men, unidentified, were brought to MacKinnon by the surgeon. They listened to his full story and questioned him in detail. He was transferred to corps area headquarters that afternoon by ambulance. There he was questioned again. He was regaining his strength rapidly, but he was growing quite tired of the whole rigmarole, and wanted assurance that his warning was being taken seriously. The latest of his interrogators reassured him. “Compose yourself,” he told Dave, 'you are to see the commanding officer this afternoon.”

The corps area commander, a nice little chap with a quick, birdlike manner and a most unmilitary appearance, listened gravely while MacKinnon recited his story for what seemed to him the fiftieth time. He nodded agreement when David finished. “Rest assured, David MacKinnon, that all necessary steps are being taken.”

“But how about their weapon?”

“That is taken care of-and as for the Barrier, it may not be as easy to break as our neighbors think. But your efforts are appreciated. May I do you some service?”

“Well, no-not for myself, but there are two of my friends in there-'He asked that something be done to rescue Magee, and that Persephone be enabled to come out, if she wished.

“I know of that girl,” the general remarked. “We will get in touch with her. If at any time she wishes to become a citizen, it can be arranged. As for Magee, that is another matter-'He touched the stud of his desk visiphone. “Send Captain Randall in.”

A neat, trim figure in the uniform of a captain of the United States Army entered with a light step. MacKinnon glanced at him with casual, polite interest, then his expression went to pieces. “Fader!” he yelled.

Their mutual greeting was hardly sufficiently decorous for the private office of a commanding general, but the general did not seem to mind. When they had calmed down, MacKinnon had to ask the question uppermost in his mind. “But see here, Fader, all this doesn't make sense-'He paused, staring, then pointed a finger accusingly, 'I know! You're in the secret service!”

The Fader grinned cheerfully. “Did you think,” he observed, 'that the United States Army would leave a plague spot like that unwatched?”

The general cleared his throat. “What do you plan to do now, David MacKinnon?”

“Eh! Me? Why, I don't have any plans-'He thought for a moment, then turned to his friend. “Do you know, Fader, I believe I'll turn in for psychological treatment after all. You're on the Outside -”

“I don't believe that will be necessary,” interrupted the general gently.

“No? Why not, sir?”

“You have cured yourself. You may not be aware of it, but four psychotechnicians have interviewed you. Their reports agree. I am authorized to tell you that your status as a free citizen has been restored, if you wish it.”

The general and Captain 'the Fader” Randall managed tactfully between them to terminate the interview. Randall walked back to the infirmary with his friend. Dave wanted a thousand questions answered at once. “But Fader,” he demanded, 'you must have gotten out before I did.”

“A day or two.”

“Then my job was unnecessary!”

“I wouldn't say that,” Randall contradicted. “I might not have gotten through. As a matter of fact, they had all the details even before I reported. There are others-Anyhow,” he continued, to change the subject, 'now that you are here, what will you do?”

“Me? It's too soon to say . . . It won't be classical literature, that's a cinch. If I wasn't such a dummy in maths, I might still try for interplanetary.”

“Well, we can talk about it tonight,” suggested Fader, glancing at his chrono. “I've got to run along, but I'll stop by later, and we'll go over to the mess for dinner.”

He was out the door with speed reminiscent of the thieves” kitchen. Dave watched him, then said suddenly, 'Hey! Fader! Why couldn't I get into the secret ser -,

But the Fader was gone-he must ask himself.